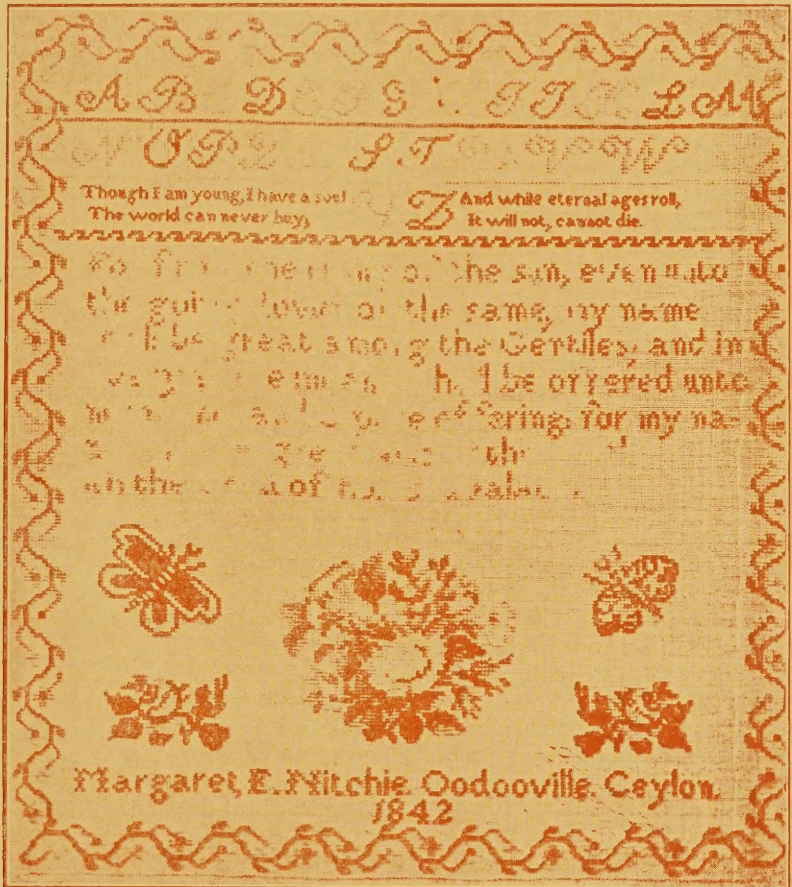


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The Ceylon Basket and the Sampler



THE CEYLON BASKET AND THE SAMPLER

"It is people that count. You want to put yourself into people; they touch other people; these, others still, and so you go on working forever."—Alice Freeman Palmer



TINY yellowed shirt, hand-sewed with painstaking stitches, a pamphlet in strange characters with the date 1838 on its cover, a newspaper clipping or two, a picture of a turbaned Oriental, and a packet of old letters, such are the contents of my "treasure-basket," a soft little covered basket made many years ago in Ceylon.

On the wall near the basket hangs a brown sampler worked in colored wools. Beneath a variegated alphabet appears in sober green the quaint quatrain:

Though I am young, I have a soul
The world can never buy;
And while eternal ages roll,
It will not, cannot, die.

A long verse of Scripture following has been corrupted by moths, but the words "the sun—the same, my name—great among the Gentiles" can still be discerned and with the aid of a good memory or a concordance one can decipher the rest. Below this text gay butterflies disport themselves among gayer flowers, and last, but chief in interest, is the signature

MARGARET E. NITCHIE, OODOOVILLE, CEYLON.

1842.

Margaret Evertson Nitchie is a memorial name. It was the name of my grandmother's mother, and was given by my grandmother to a little girl whom she supported in the "Female Boarding School" at Oodooville, Ceylon. A time-tattered letter in the Ceylon basket written to the child's "Benefactress" by Miss Eliza Agnew in 1842 explains the shirt and the sampler.

"Margaret was received in this school in 1837," writes Miss Agnew, "being as was supposed about six or seven years of age. She is a child of heathen parents. Her Tamil name is 'Mootoopully' which signifies a Pearl-child. Ever since she has been here, her deportment has been in every respect becoming. She excels in sewing, to which the accompanying sampler will bear testimony. The canvas was given her by Mrs. Spaulding (the Principal) as a reward for doing her work well and keeping it neatly. Mrs. S. thought she ought to send it to you and suggested it to Margaret, with which she was highly delighted. I am well aware it will not

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compare with fancy worsted work done in New York, but when you take into consideration the coarseness of the canvas, the want of a frame, patterns, and the choice of colors, you will readily admit it is as well done as could be expected by a little girl of eleven years of age. The small jacket which Margaret also made and sends you is a specimen of the kind worn by the girls in this school."

The letter outlines the somewhat monotonous routine of Margaret's school-days and describes the week-end as follows:—"On Saturday they spend one hour in the A. M. in study, the remainder of the day they have for bathing and making necessary preparations for the Sabbath. Before bathing they rub eggs and the juice of limes all through their hair, which is washed off with warm water in which dried olives have been boiled. After this preparation they bathe by pouring cold water over themselves. They never consider themselves as having been bathed unless their hair has been thoroughly washed." No wonder it required the greater part of Saturday to make "necessary preparations for the Sabbath"! "On Sabbath they attend school three times and church twice—Friday, Saturday and Sabbath evenings are set apart as seasons for social prayers."

After speaking of "many meetings in their prayer rooms which are conducted by the girls themselves" and of a semi-weekly enquiry meeting held by Mrs. Spaulding, Miss Agnew continues: "About fifteen of the girls give pleasing evidence that they have passed from 'death unto life.' The others are still 'pursuing.' *Your Margaret* is numbered among the latter class."

Nine years later Miss Agnew wrote again, enclosing an exquisitely penned letter couched in graceful though somewhat laborious English "written for Margaret E. Nitchie by her husband, Joel R. Arnold," and signed "Your ever grateful and sincere beneficiary." Mr. Arnold tells of the death of their only son, Charles, at the age of twenty-one months. "His infancy," the father writes, "proved to us that he would have become a promising and smart fellow in a few years.—But an illness which continued for about a week severed his connection with us and took him to the realms of joy and rest.—We are well up to this present moment, though Margaret is not in these days. She does not seem to be so happy as when our child was with us. She attends to her Christian duties as far as possible." My grandmother, too, had recently suffered the loss of two young children, and it is very touching to see how the sympathy of these Ceylonese Christians goes out in a desire to comfort her. In closing, "Let not our names become obsolete," the

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writer begs, "to the circle of your thoughts and that of your family and let no time be lost to offer prayers on our behalf to the throne of our heavenly Father, who is the source of all bliss and happiness."

In an earlier letter Margaret had told of her marriage to this Christian man, a teacher in the "Female Boarding School." She had confessed to her "Benefactress" that when she was married she was not a church member. "But," she says, "through the continued influence of the prayers offered in my behalf by you and the kind missionaries who labor here I was joyfully admitted to the Church of Christ and hope to stand firm in the faith It is my earnest entreaty that you will never forget to recognize me as your daughter and pray for me and recommend me to your children as their dear sister in Ceylon As a Christian I shall expect to meet you at the right hand of our Judge in the realms of bliss, though I can neither anticipate nor hope to see you face to face here on earth."

In 1875 Margaret went home to those "realms of bliss." Twenty years later my grandmother followed to meet this "daughter" whom she had never seen, but whom she had grown to love with a very real affection. Shortly after my grandmother's death came word of the death of Mr. Arnold and a sketch of his useful life from the *Morning Star*, of which he had been the Tamil editor, accompanied by his picture, the turbaned Oriental of my treasure-basket. From Miss Howland, then in charge of the Oodooville School, we learned these facts about Margaret's family: That of her ten children, seven had died in infancy, that the two remaining sons were men respected in the community, and that the daughter had married an agent of the Ceylon Steamship Company, an earnest Christian man. Three of her granddaughters had attended the Oodooville School and her children and grandchildren were all Christians.

It was a little heathen girl who nearly seventy-five years ago set the neat stitches in Grandmother's sampler, yet her children are Christians to the third and fourth generation. Truly "the fruit of the righteous is a tree of life and he (or she) that winneth souls is wise."

"And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever."

E. P. C.

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